Crane※ Pops Up on Hamlet's Stage

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Yesterday, I received two documents from Sensei Sakamoto, who works at the same parish. One was a copy of his and the church's "notice of withdrawal from the denomination" addressed to the president of the denomination, stating, "We cannot go along with the way the denomination has been moving along since it joined the Japan Evangelical Alliance. It also stated, "The problem is our view of history. The other was a document titled "The Church's Policy and My Views," which was Sensei's objection to the "Statement on the National Flag and Anthem" by the Church's Social Affairs Committee and explained his decision this time.

I have not discussed this issue in detail with Sakamoto Sensei, and I have only read his document, so I cannot say whether I share his views or not, but I was one of those who were concerned about the "attitude" of the Church toward such issues for some time now. I would like to summarize this essay because I feel that I should not remain silent on the issue that compelled one senior evangelist to make a serious decision to leave the Church. I hope that this article will help you to think about this issue. I would be even more honored if you would consider leaving the church after reading this.

When I see and hear the social activities and political statements of the Japan Evangelical Alliance (JEA), I cannot deny that it is definitely to the left. The "Report on the First JEA 'New Religious Freedom' Seminar," which was recently sent to me along with the documents of the denomination and titled "Where Do We Stand Now? Also, in reading some documents by the Social Affairs Committee of the denomination, it seems as if they are following the JEA's thinking. Or is JEA following the lead of our Social Affairs Committee?

1. about the documents of the Social Problems Committee

I am impressed by the serious attitude of the teachers in this committee to learning with each published text. However, the first thing to be clear about this is that it is not the official position of the denomination. Secondly, it was a great mistake for it to have been published as if it were the official position of the organization in its official newsletters and other publications. I imagine that the reason why Sakamoto-sensei was so "shocked" was not only the content of the Social Problems Committee's opinion itself, but also the fact that such an opinion, which was only one opinion, was published in the official newsletters of the denomination to which he belongs, as if it were the official opinion of the denomination.

It is only natural that the various organizations of a religious order, such as the Domestic Mission Department, Overseas Mission Department, Sunday School Department, etc., formulate their own plans and conduct educational activities in accordance with the fundamental beliefs and stance of the religious order. However, I believe that, for example, it should be avoided, even as a matter of procedure, for one department to issue a position on a political, social, or ideological matter, for which the Church has not yet formulated a basic stance or official position, as in the case of the flag and anthem issue, as if it were representing the opinions of the entire Church. Nevertheless, the fact that it has been published in a newspaper distributed to the general public as if it were the official opinion of the Church is highly regrettable.

(2) The political, social, and ideological positions of the Church

Our Order is not a political, social, or ideological organization. What unites us is our faith in Jesus Christ. Our organization is a faith organization. It is the Body of Christ, the Church. In this organization, we must not create any factors other than faith in Jesus Christ, no matter if they are factors that bind or tear us apart. No political affiliation, social ideology, race, culture, profession, hobby, or pastime should be a factor that unites or divides the Body of Christ, the Church.

If a denomination takes a political or ideological position, or unites its views, it becomes a factor other than faith in Christ. Faith in Christ takes a thousand different forms, depending on the stage of adaptation to one's actual life. There are so many ways to understand, interpret, and respond. It is not the Bible's call to unite them all. There can and should be people from all social classes in the

denomination. There can and should be people on the left side of the ideological spectrum and people on the right side of the ideological spectrum. Each should live by faith and conscience in Christ, and what is important for us is to maintain the basic attitude of following Christ.

Therefore, the church should not make a political or ideological statement, such as the statement on the national flag and anthem. It is to create a cause other than faith in Christ. This also has to do with the JEA, of which we are a member, and we should be vigilant and alert to the fact that the JEA repeatedly makes aggressive statements on such matters. It may be necessary for us as a denomination, or individual pastors, to make a clear statement that we do not agree with such a statement, or with sending a letter to the Prime Minister.

3. Mission of the Church

Is it really necessary for the church to make such political and ideological statements and engage in social activities? What is the mission of the church? I would like to discuss this point, albeit in a shallow way.

A. Enlightenment Thought, Rationalism, Theism, and Religious Relativity

Enlightenment thought and rationalism are among the ideas that have greatly influenced modern society. They have contributed greatly to the development of society, especially in the field of natural science. On the other hand, however, such a way of thinking has also entered into biblical interpretation and the world of faith, and articles in the Bible that are not considered rational, such as creation and miracles, are denied, and the importance of prayer in the real life of faith is also diluted to the utmost. Many of the evangelical churches that have sprung up against this trend, believing the Bible to be the infallible Word of God, have become extremely theistic, and it has become difficult to believe that God hears our prayers, performs miracles, and heals us from our illnesses. Miracles and healing were confined to the ancient biblical world.

Many churches that had been baptized into the Enlightenment, rationalism, or theistic thinking tended to abandon the absolutes of the Christian faith as well. All religions of the world are good and valuable in their own cultures. They also went into the world of religious relativism, thinking that in some sense it was a gospel other than or preceding the biblical gospel. The WCC, as a matter of

course, called for the cessation of proselytizing. The WCC called for the cessation of missionary work as a matter of course, saying that the need of the church is not to proselytize, but to find the gospel in each land and in each culture. So, instead of missionary work, the church chose the path of so-called social work, building hospitals and schools, and contributing to society. Soon after, it was understood that no matter how one continues to serve society, unless the social organization, economic structure, and political form that generates poverty and discrimination are changed, there will be no essential solution. The church must fight against such social ills that create poverty, discrimination, and other forms of inhumanity.

Many of the churches belonging to or sympathetic to the WCC have neglected evangelism in the process of fighting these social ills, and as a natural result, have lost more and more members and become weaker and weaker. On the other hand, these churches became more outspoken, and some of them even accepted armed struggle to fight social ills. It is said that some Japanese churches sent funds to purchase weapons for anti-government guerrillas in Latin America.

B. Evangelical Movement

On the other hand, many churches advocating evangelicalism, especially those often teased as "fundamentalist," were in a sense born out of a sense of crisis, rivalry, or disgust with the aforementioned churches, which are considered socialist, and initially focused exclusively on evangelism and missionary work. However, over the years of promoting world missions, it gradually began to pay attention again to the importance of social activities, deepened its fellowship with the socialist churches that it had viewed as enemies, and even began to try to understand their way of thinking.

It was against this backdrop that a worldwide gathering of evangelical churches was held in Lausanne in 1974. The Lausanne Conference, held in Lausanne in 1974, has continued to have a profound impact on evangelical churches around the world, and one of its key players was John Stott, a noted biblical and missionary scholar. The power he exerted permeates the conference itself, the conference's written declarations, and the subsequent influence of the conference.

Stott interacted with and reflected the ideas of the "radical" leaders of the social wing of the Catholic Church, who were very active in Latin America at the time, and who were strongly influenced by the "gospel of openness. So it is a fact that many of the representatives did not sign the Lausanne Declaration because they did not like its "stench of the gospel of openness.

Evangelical churches in Japan, who had originally interacted with Stott, quickly accepted the Lausanne Declaration "as if it were the Bible. It is amazing how many well-known biblical and missionary scholars have uncritically quoted, promoted, and tried to implement the Declaration. This is understandable, considering the Japanese culture of adherence. From the perspective of evangelicals around the world, this may also be a reaction to a sense of guilt, a so-called clockwork movement, for having retreated from social activities altogether due to a sense of rivalry with or dislike of the socialist churches.

4. stott's missionary theory and its problems

Stott says that the mission of the Church, or the purpose for which the Church is sent into the world, is evangelism and social action. He explains that evangelism and social activities are like two wheels on one side of an axle, and if one wheel is missing, it is useless.

Therefore, evangelical or fundamentalist churches that have gone forward with a single-minded focus on evangelism have not had a true picture of what it means to be a church, and have been defective churches.

Stott's definition of evangelism is also a very strange definition, but we will not deal with it here. His concept of social action is not limited to philanthropic relief work, but also includes fighting social action that does not include armed struggle, but does include a harsh condemnation of all social ills. (There seems to be a growing tendency to divide social action into philanthropic relief work and the fight against social ills.)

Anyone who knows the Bible knows by heart that nowhere is the church explicitly taught or commanded to engage in social action. The teaching and command to evangelize and proselytize is clearly and repeatedly repeated. Nor are there any examples in the Bible of churches embarking on social activities for the purpose of social action. Is it right to elevate something that has no

direct teaching, command, or example in the Bible to something as important as the mission of the church? There is no clear teaching or command in the Bible against making the baptism of the Holy Spirit the theology of the church. What a surprise in this day and age when there are many theologians who oppose the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a theology of the church, saying that there is no clear teaching or command in the Bible and that there are few examples of it.

When I say this, several objections immediately arise. First, did not Christ also engage in social activities? He healed the sick, gave money and goods to the poor, and sharply denounced social ills.

Christ's mission, the purpose for which He came into the world, was to redeem the world, that is, to put into practice His redemptive love. For this purpose, Christ was born into the world, lived, worked, and died. It was not to eliminate poverty and discrimination in the world. The Church is sent into the world by Christ as His ambassador. It is to continue Christ's work, the practice of redemptive love. The Church is sent as Christ was sent by the Father. We are sent for the same purpose, in the same form or manner. We are not sent for a work that Christ did not intend.

How, then, should we think of Christ's healing and assistance to the poor? Certainly this was an aspect of social activity. It is true that it was a social activity, although I think it had more to do with the redemptive coming of the Kingdom of God. The question is, however, whether this was the purpose of Christ's coming into the world.

The purpose of Christ's coming was to practice redemptive love. However, as He traveled around the world to practice that redemptive love, He encountered miserable human beings. When the nature of love encounters a miserable figure, it produces a reaction of pity. That compassion produces the action of helping. In other words, Christ's social activities were not the purpose or mission for which He came into the world, but rather an outpouring of His general love, which was love from before creation. It was also the way of life of Christ, who became a perfect man. However, Christ did not come to live, but to die, that is, to practice redemptive love.

Therefore, the Church, sent as Christ was sent, will naturally live while practicing general love. But that is not the mission of the Church, just as it was not the mission of Christ. It is the way of life of the Church, just as it was the way of life of Christ. It is a way of life, a state of being. Therefore, social activity is not to be the mission of the Church, the purpose of its existence. It is something that the church should not live for and should not put its primary focus on. But on the other hand, it is something that the Church must never lose.

What is taken up further is the commandment to love one's neighbor. The argument is that loving one's neighbor is the second most important commandment after loving God. This love of neighbor is important because it is universal. However, this belongs only to general love and is the way all mankind should live, not the "purpose" for which the Church was sent into the world.

What we do not want to be mistaken here is that the general love we are talking about now is something that is shown only to people outside the church, and is different from the "brotherly love" of loving one another inside the church. Brotherly love is the love of brothers and sisters in Christ for each other, as Christ loved us, and is generated, enlightened, and strengthened by God's redemptive love. This brotherly love should be practiced within the Church, transcending race, differentiation, and national borders. When we say, "Love. I knew it for the first time. Since I met Jesus. The practice of brotherly love is the kind of love that Paul describes in his letter to the Church. The practice of brotherly love is what Paul called a "work of grace" and risked his life for. He collected donations from Macedonia, Achaia, and other Gentile churches to help the famine-stricken Jerusalem church, and personally sent them to Jerusalem after risking arrest, imprisonment, and even death. Yet, neither Paul nor the church responded in any way to the hunger, nakedness, and sickness that were so commonplace in the extra-church societies of the time. At the very least, they are not mentioned in the Bible. Therefore, it is biblically and theologically impossible to incorporate social action as a charitable activity as part of the church's mission.

5. the battle for justice

The next issue is the fight against social ills, the fight for justice. This is what is at issue in this issue. That is, the JEA and our Social Concerns Committee seem to believe that the Church, as the voice or agent of God's justice, should rightly take up the fight against social ills. (I have already attempted to refute JEA's "Theology of Salvation" published several years ago, as I have distributed to my mentors.)

We, the Church, are indeed Christ's agents, speaking with His authority and acting with His authority, but He is only the Christ of the First Advent, the humble Christ born in the horse boat, the Christ who has completed His work of redemption through suffering, the Christ of the living and He is not the Christ of glory, the Christ of the second advent, who comes to judge the living and the dead. We are entrusted with the gospel, given power over demons, and even given the keys of heaven, but we are not given the eyes to see all that is good and evil in the world, the ability to judge rightly, or the authority to condemn.

History shows us that the church has often turned into a brutal criminal when it wrongly assumed that it was a surrogate of the Second Advent Christ, the Judge. We must also learn from history. According to Paul, we will eventually judge even the angels. But now, as he clearly states, it is not our place to judge things outside the church.

And so it is not for us, much less for some within the church, to speak for the church as a whole and declare what is evil and what is good in today's society. It is hubris for the Church to think that it can do so, and it is a grave error to do so. In fact, there are those among us who agree with the thinking of the Social Concerns Committee, and there are those who are not convinced at all costs, and there can be no such thing as a unification of opinion. If we attempt to do so, there will always be those who will be marginalized. We should not marginalize any part of the community because of this. I believe that through the writings of the Social Concerns Committee this time, Dr. Sakamoto has chosen to represent many believers who are likely to be marginalized and who dare to be marginalized on their own initiative.

Among Christ's disciples, there were those who belonged to the right-wing zealots, those of the priestly class who supported the puppet government, those

who were tax collectors in obeisance to the oppressor, Rome, and those who belonged to the Roman army. Politically and ideologically, they were completely incompatible, but they were united in Christ. This situation must have been even more complicated in the early church. Living in such a context, the church did not seek political or ideological unity, but unity in diversity.

In this kind of discussion, the enforcement of God's justice, as referred to in the prophetic books and elsewhere, is often brought up. Certainly, the Old Testament prophets, with God's authority, sought justice for Israel and denounced the rulers. However, it is important to understand that the recommendation for the enforcement of "divine justice" in the Old Testament era was only in the context of the "theocratic government" of Israel at that time. It should not be applied to the human world of the New Testament era. The Church, which is said to be the prophet of the New Testament era, does not live in a "theocracy. It is living in a pagan polity, just as Paul lived. What Paul did against the pagan rulers was not to demand justice, protest, or denounce them, but to pray for them.

Paul also lived in a world of discrimination. It must have been incomparable to the modern world. Paul's belief was that in Christ there is no discrimination at all. In reality, however, he accepted some discrimination against women and even slavery. Rather than raising a flag in protest against such social conditions, he accepted them as customs and institutions and taught people to live according to those customs and institutions, while uplifting, teaching, and encouraging the basic spirit of rejecting them outright, thereby laying the foundation for the church to overcome them. James also taught them to endure, not fight, against the social ills that surrounded them. It is an expression of the spirit of Christ.

6. from a missionary perspective

Is it really beneficial from the standpoint of the church's mission of mission and evangelism for a church or denomination to issue a unified political and ideological view, or to make public statements or protest documents that are not required by Christ or the Bible?

Such actions inevitably narrow the gate to life with elements other than the

gospel. Only the gospel determines the width of the gate. We must never do anything to widen or narrow the gate to life with man-made factors other than the gospel. Furthermore, the current views of JEA and the Social Problems Committee sound like something the old Socialist Party would say. It is the kind of view that the majority of people in Japan today have already given up on. If it seems that it is Christianity that says these things, the majority of the people have given up on Christianity. This is not an argument about whether the views are right or wrong, but rather about the danger of Christianity being swallowed up in the wave of Japanese people's disillusionment with the Socialist Party.

While the fact that the leftist movement in Japan was spawned as part of the Christian movement may be important, the fact that the left is not the only Christianity is even more important. If Christ commands us to do something, if the Bible demands it, we will do it, no matter what the masses say or what the politicians think. But this is an issue that both Christ and the Bible have rather avoided getting involved in. Christ said, "What is Caesar's is Caesar's." Those words were not speaking about the issue of money. The Jews, who were living in an outmoded sense with the eggshell of "theocracy" still attached to their asses, tried to parallel Christ's sovereignty with that of Rome, and to pit the two against each other, but Christ declared that His sovereignty had nothing to do with that of Rome, and that they were of different dimensions. Christ's first advent was the first advent of Christ in the world. The First Advent Christ refused to be involved in the politics of the world.

Conclusion

I know some of my colleagues who say that they do not give the Assembly Magazine, which contains the writings of the Social Concerns Committee, to their congregations because of pastoral considerations. This is because it hinders the church from carrying out its mission of evangelism, the supreme command of Christ. I believe it is precisely in this respect that Dr. Sakamoto was left in the dark.

Again, I hope that Sensei Sakamoto will stay with the Church. There is no need for Sensei to leave the group just because he has a difference of opinion with the Social Problems Committee. I, once again, clearly object to the fact that such opinions of some people (or even most people) are presented in such a

way that it seems to be the official position of the Church.

Of course, discussing political and ideological issues is not evil, but rather necessary, but it is wrong for us as a church and as a denomination to state a particular position. For we must not take Christ's justice into our own hands. Just as a victim of crime should not take "justice" into his own hands without waiting for a fair trial. It is not the role of the Church to take the fight to social ills. To show one's face where it is not one's role is like the evening crane Tsuu※ suddenly popping up on the stage in Hamlet. The more serious the outburst is, the more it becomes a comedy, and the more it becomes a tragedy.

※ “Tsuu” is the famous tragic heroine of a well-known Japanese folk tale “Yuuzuru” often time repeated on various stages.

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